

Fort Matanzas

National Monument
Florida

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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1997
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1565 When King Philip II of Spain learned that the Frenchman Rene de Laudonniere had established Fort Caroline **1** in Florida, he was incensed: The colony sat on land belonging to the Spanish crown. Spanish treasure fleets sailed along the Florida coast on their way to Spain; Fort Caroline provided a perfect base for French attacks. Worst of all to the devoutly Catholic Philip, the settlers were Huguenots—French Protestants. Despite Philip's protests, Jean Ribault sailed from France in May 1565 with more than 600 soldiers and settlers to resupply Fort Caroline. Gen. Pedro Menéndez de Aviles, charged with removing the French, also sailed with some 800 people, arriving at the St. Johns River **2** in August, shortly after Ribault. After a brief sea chase the Spanish retired south to a camp **3** they had earlier established and named St. Augustine.

Ribault sailed on September 10 to attack St. Augustine, but a hurricane carried his ships far to the south, wrecking them on the Florida coast between present day

Daytona Beach and Cape Canaveral. **4** Menéndez took advantage of the soldiers' absence, attacking Fort Caroline and killing most of its inhabitants. He

then learned from Timucuan Indians that a group of white men were on the beach a few miles south. He marched with 70 soldiers to where an inlet **5** had blocked 127 of the shipwrecked Frenchmen trying to get back to Fort Caroline.

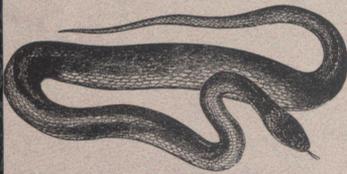
Fatal Encounters



Hiding his soldiers behind a dune, Mendéndez had the French ferried ten at a time across the inlet. Hands bound, they began marching, but when they reached a line Menéndez had drawn in the sand, the Spanish soldiers fell on them with sword and pike. Only 16 were spared—Catholics, some impressed Breton sailors, and four artisans needed at St. Augustine. Two weeks later the grim sequence of events was repeated: Timucuan reports of men to the south. More French survivors at the inlet—this time including Ribault. On October 12 Ribault and his men met their fate: again in groups of ten, falling at the line in the sand. The Spanish soldiers killed 134 Frenchmen, sparing 12 musicians and four Catholics. From that time, the inlet was called *Matanzas*—"slaughters."

Barrier Island Refuge

In preserving the site of historic events on Anastasia Island, the



National Park Service also set aside a slice of an intact barrier island ecosystem. Distinct habitats harbor a number of species, several of which are listed as endangered or threatened. From May to August, the beach is the nesting site for sea turtles, including the loggerhead (threatened) and the green and leatherback (both endan-

gered). The beach is also home to the ghost crab and the threatened least tern.

On the ocean side of the island, sea oats, seaside legumes, and other salt-tolerant plants growing on the dunes help stabilize them and provide cover for several species. The endangered Anastasia Island beach mouse lives among the sparse vegetation. In

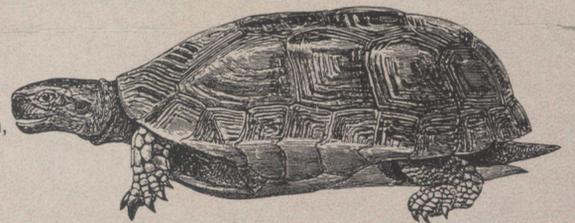


the scrub areas of the dunes, characterized by prickly pear cactus, bayberry, and green-brier vines, the gopher tortoise (right) digs branching burrows up to 30 feet into the dunes. Other species such as the gopher frog and the endangered eastern indigo snake (top left) exploit the tortoise's labor for their own shelter.

The oldest and highest part of the island is covered with a hammock—a stabilized dune on which larger species have taken root in the thin layer of decayed remains from pioneer species. Palmetto, magnolia, and live oak provide a can-

opy under which diverse species can thrive: funnel spiders, snakes, the great horned owl (bottom left), the Carolina wren, raccoons, and opossum.

Rising tides create tidal creeks that twice daily flood low-lying areas behind the dunes. Great blue herons, snowy egrets, and green-backed herons feed on the fish and crustaceans living in the tidal salt marshes. Raccoons, owls, and night herons hunt here at night. At low tide the mud flats are alive with fiddler crabs.

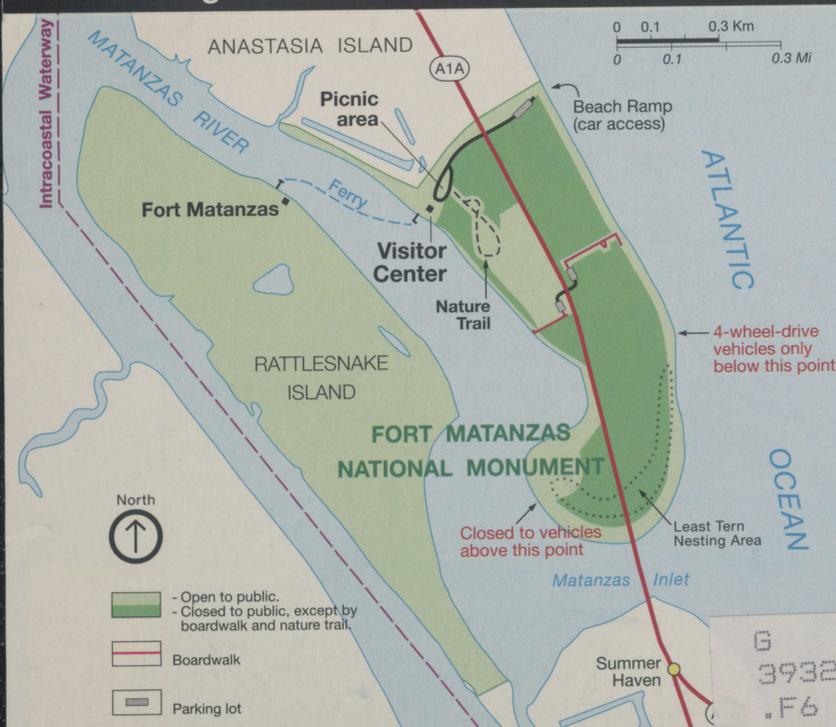


The park is a nesting area for endangered and threatened animal species. Please observe any area closure signs. The ocean beaches, used by marine turtles for nesting and hatching, are closed to vehicles at night during the summer. To help preserve the fragile environment, do not walk or drive on the dunes and do not pick sea oats. Individuals who cut, break, or in any way destroy sea oats or other plants are subject to fines and imprisonment.

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Visiting the Park



Fort Matanzas National Monument is 14 miles south of Saint Augustine and is reached via Fla. A1A on Anastasia Island. The park is open 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily except on December 25. There is no admission fee. The park consists of almost 300 acres on Rattlesnake and Anastasia Islands. The visitor center is open, when staffing allows, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. An 8-minute film about the fort and the area's history is shown. Restrooms are located at the visitor center parking lot. A free passenger ferry carries visitors to the fort, weather permitting, from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Availability is first-come, first-served. The ferry

and the fort are not wheelchair accessible; a dock where the fort can be viewed from across the river is wheelchair accessible, as are the visitor center, the restrooms, and a 0.6-mile boardwalk nature trail. For information contact: Superintendent, Fort Matanzas National Monument, 1 East Castillo Drive, St. Augustine, FL 32084; on the Internet: www.nps.gov/foma.

Swimming A St. Johns County beach pass can be purchased to drive or park on the beach during the summer season. There are also free parking lots. **Warning:** Many vehicles driving on the beach get stuck in the sand and are caught by the

rising tide. Ask a ranger about conditions.

For Your Safety • Do not swim in the treacherous waters of the inlet. • Do not climb on the fort walls. • Avoid the sharp oyster shells along the river bank.

Regulations • Alcohol and firearms are prohibited. • No glass containers may be used on the beach. • Pets must be on a leash. Clean up after your pet. • Speed limit on the beach is 10 mph. • The fort may be visited only by ranger-led groups. • Help protect the fragile coquina structure by not climbing or sitting on fort walls. • Docking of private vessels at the fort or letting off passengers is prohibited.

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